

Regarding HB 548

SENATE AGRICULTURE

EXHIBIT NO. 1

DATE 4-2-2009

BILL NO. HB 548

Vet: Dogs were horribly neglected

Story available at <http://billingsgazette.net/articles/2009/01/03/news/local/24-vetdogs.txt>

Published on Saturday, January 03, 2009. By CLAIR JOHNSON

A Billings veterinarian caring for some of the approximately 200 dogs and other animals seized this week from a Ballantine woman said the animals had been living in horrible conditions. All vets see neglect cases, said Rob Bruner, of the Big Sky Pet Center, 7565 Entryway Drive, but "this magnitude ... I've never seen anything like this."

Bruner helped the Yellowstone County Sheriff's Office with the seizure Tuesday of animals from the property of Linda Kapsa, who owns Shady Lane Kennels. On Friday, the pet center had 47 of the English shepherds, while about 150 of the dogs are being housed in old MetraPark horse barns.

Animals responding well Overall, the dogs at the pet center are responding well to antibiotics and are improving, Bruner said. "Just getting proper nutrition and water and adequate shelter goes a long way in the health of these animals," he said. But they have a ways to go on Friday morning, volunteers feeding the dogs at MetraPark found one dead in a stall. The cause of death wasn't known Friday. Bruner visits the dogs at the fairgrounds once a day and transports dogs to and from the pet center as needed.

One of the dogs at the pet center is a female, identified as I-12, that had a litter of seven puppies about four weeks ago. Five of the puppies have red sores on their bellies that appear to be an infection that wasn't treated properly, Bruner said. He picked up each puppy to check on the sores as the mother watched warily. "It's OK, ma," he assured her.

Road to recovery Two other dogs at the pet center also have litters with some of the puppies showing similar sores, the vet said. The dogs are receiving oral antibiotics, and Bruner thinks they will recover. Eight other dogs are about to have puppies. "We're going to have so many puppies, it won't be funny," Bruner said. The dogs seized this week have shown no signs of parvovirus, a highly contagious disease transmitted through feces. But five dogs out of a group taken Dec. 11, when the Sheriff's Office executed the first search warrant, had the virus, Bruner said. Two of those dogs died. None of the dogs has been euthanized.

On Dec. 11, law enforcement seized 10 dogs and two cats that they believed needed immediate veterinary care. They also found 13 dead dogs on the property. Investigators took photos and video. In the seizure Tuesday, 189 live and 11 dead dogs were removed along with 27 chickens, 10 cockatiels and a cat. The investigation began in June after law enforcement received calls about the living conditions for the animals.

Bruner also has the cats and cockatiels taken from Kapsa's property. The birds are healthy enough, he said, but their living conditions were horrible. Bruner and Catherine Schaeffer, who operates a cat sanctuary and was hired to manage the dogs at the fairgrounds, continue to assess the animals and organize their care. Most of the dogs are scared and "rightfully so," Bruner said, as they're getting used to new smells, surroundings and people. Most of the dogs are not leash-

trained, although all of the dogs seized Dec. 11 have since been trained, he said.

English shepherds are work dogs but are not as common in this area as border collies, Australian shepherds and blue heelers, Bruner said. English shepherds can be "very faithful companions," he said. "If it all pans out, they'd make great pets." Also Friday, Schaeffer was setting up operations in a small trailer that the Sheriff's Office moved next to the stalls. There is a table, a telephone, a heater and boxes on the floor. Schaeffer said she has been overwhelmed by the numbers of people calling to volunteer to help care for the animals.

Fifteen volunteers are already working with the dogs. For now, Schaeffer is using people experienced with dog training to get the animals ready for assignment to volunteers with less experience. Schaeffer, who operates Last Chance Cat Sanctuary and drives a truck with license plates KAT LDY, said she loves dogs, too. "Basically, I'm an animal person, period. I have a love for all animals," she said. Schaeffer has 105 cats at her cat sanctuary, which is a no-kill sanctuary for unwanted but adoptable cats.

And at least \$100 has been donated for care of the dogs, and the Chase Hawks Memorial Roughstock Rodeo has pledged \$250, Undersheriff Jay Bell said. The investigation into possible charges against Kapsa is continuing, Bell said. He thought there may be a decision next week on whether to file charges. The Sheriff's Office has been working with Dave Pauli, Northern Rockies regional director of the Humane Society, for help in getting coordinators and volunteers. Schaeffer was hired part time to manage the dogs based on recommendations from Pauli and the county's animal control workers.

For now, supplies are adequate. PetSmart has donated food and other items. The donations will be tapped for food as needed and for other expenses, Bell said. While it is uncertain how long it will take to resolve the case, the dogs have a home at the fairgrounds for at least three months before other livestock is set to arrive. If the case runs longer, the Sheriff's Office may have to look for another location for the dogs. The Sheriff's Office is not having to pay for use of the barns but probably will help pay for cleanup, Bell said.

"We do not have a budget for this at all," the undersheriff said. "We'll probably have to dip into contingency funds for this. I don't have a clue what we're going to be looking at when it's all said and done. We've never had an operation like this."

Copyright © The Billings Gazette, a division of Lee Enterprises.

**Approved For
Distribution**

By: 